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THE CAYAPA AND COLORADO

By JOHN MURRA

INTRODUCTION

The *Cayapa* and the *Colorado* are the last surviving Indian groups in the lush western lowlands of Ecuador (maps 1 and 6). Once an area of extensive Indian occupation, western Ecuador is now inhabited by a Spanish-speaking population of mixed Indian, Negro, and white ancestry, known as montuvios. The *Cayapa* and *Colorado* have precariously managed to hang on to their jungle homes. Speaking closely related if mutually unintelligible languages of the *Barbacoan* division of the *Chibchan* family, they represent the southernmost extension of that major division. Comparative studies with other *Chibchan*-speaking groups in Highland and eastern Colombia, with *Quechua*-speaking Indians in Highland Ecuador, and with various Montaña groups should prove of considerable culture-historical interest.

THE CAYAPA

The *Cayapa* are a riverain people inhabiting the lowlands of northwestern Ecuador. Sprinkled through the jungles of Esmeraldas Province, an area of difficult colonization and control, they managed for centuries to avoid the enslavement suffered by their Highland neighbors or the ethnic annihilation of most Coast aborigines. Only in the past few decades have their settlements been pushed back into the hills by Spanish-speaking montuvio and Negro homesteaders. World War II requirements in balsa wood, rubber, and other tropical commodities have accelerated this process of displacement and acculturation.

The Cayapa River and its affluents, from the mouth of the Anzole to the foot of the Andes, are the main area of *Cayapa* settlement. Barrett (1925) found three concentration spots: Punta Venado, Sapayo Grande, and San Miguel, corresponding to three political, tribal divisions, which might since have shifted or amalgamated. In addition, small groups of *Cayapa*, in various degrees of acculturation, are found in the Santiago Valley and along the coast into Colombia. Estimates of their numbers vary but hover around a mean of 2,000.

The chief source and authority on the *Cayapa* remains S. A. Barrett's monograph (1925). Barrett visited them in 1908–9, long enough to bring

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[611] There is some evidence of patrilocality, which might be reflected in the closer grouping of terms for fraternal nephews and great-nephews. But the patrilineal bias does not seem very strong. Within the family, men do all the fishing and hunting, the women all the food gathering, cooking, child rearing, and weaving. Men always do the sewing. Women make baskets, mats, and all the pottery. The two sexes cooperate in agriculture, the men clearing the fields, their wives tending the crops and harvesting. They also cooperate in the distillation of rum and the paddling of canoes while on trips.

Politically, the *Cayapa* tribe is divided into three parts: Punta Venado, Sapayo Grande, and San Miguel. Each has its chief (gobernador) and a full complement of Spanish-titled officials: secretario, teniente político, alcalde, comisario, capitán, and sargento. The governor carries a cane of black chonta wood with a silver head symbolizing his authority. Barrett feels that in most cases Spanish nomenclature was imposed on aboriginal positions. All offices are hereditary in the patrilineal line, but the new job holder needs the confirmation of the priest. The main duties of this leadership deal with the enforcement of law and order and the dispensation of justice.

None of these positions is a full-time duty, and there is no material compensation for exercising them. The chief has the largest house along the river, where he holds court and supervises punishments. He is quite responsive to public opinion and enjoys considerable prestige.

WARFARE

The *Cayapa* pride themselves on their peaceable relations with their neighbors. Tradition records no war since the mythological Indios Bravos were defeated and driven from the country. Lances and blowguns were used principally for war.

LIFE CYCLE

Childbirth.—There are few restrictions placed on the mother at childbirth. Heimann's (1931–32) report of the couvade is specifically contradicted by Barrett. Godparents baptize the infant, who takes their name. Children are never punished, and even the universal annual ceremonial whipping omits the young. Extremely friendly relations between siblings seem to be the rule. When very young, both boys and girls begin to help in adult activities or to engage in them playfully with diminutive tools. Canoeing, farming, and baby tending are all mastered before the child is 10 years old.

Puberty and marriage.—Barrett could find no puberty rites for either sex. He suggests that courtship was left to the young people. The chief marries them at a feast, where they are lectured and whipped. Like succession in political office, marriage must be confirmed by the priest.

their traditional tales probably took place by way of the Río Santiago until the confluence with the Río Cayapas was reached; thence, movement was up the Río Cayapas.

In 1879 Wolf marked on his map of Esmeraldas province a "town"--that is, a center of habitation named San Miguel de Cayapas and in 1894 Basurco recorded Cayapa living up the Río Sapallo Grande and the Río San Miguel. The latter group is reported to have an alcalde (Basurco 1894:414). Between 1809 and 1879 the Malába had apparently been replaced by the Cayapa. By 1908 Barrett reported definitely that the Cayapa were divided into three tribal groups: Punta Venado, Sapallo Grande, and San Miguel. Each group was reported as having its own ceremonial center and being led by an /únʸi/ or gobernador. During my 1959-1960 field trip, I was told by Gabriel Anapa, the /únʸi/ of the Punta Venado group, that some twenty-five years earlier a group of people had left the Sapallo Grande section and had formed a new tribal unit with its own /únʸi/. They left after a dispute with the /únʸi/ of Sapallo grande concerning the re-establishment of Pueblo Viejo, the ancient center in the mountainous upper reaches of the Río

Santiago drainage system. The dissident group claimed that the Saints were stronger in the old area and would be of greater help to the Cayapa. The new group settled in Sapallito, where they have their own ceremonial center, but for reasons unknown they did not return to Pueblo Viejo. Factionalism apparently accounts for some of the tribal fission.

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Settlement Patterns. In 1879 the banks of the Río Cayapas almost as far down as Borbon, a town at the confluence of the Río Santiago and the Río Cayapas, were inhabited by Cayapa Indians while Negroes were found mainly along the Río Santiago (Wolf 1879). By 1894 Borbon had become a Negro town, and the lower reaches of Cayapa settlement had retreated up stream toward the area of the Río Onzole. At this time, about twenty-three Negroes were reported by Basurco to be living at Telembí, a "village" of three houses about 77.5 kilometers from the mouth of the Río Cayapas. The Negroes had been given special permission by the Cayapa to live there provided they did not pan for gold which was found occasionally. (Basurco 1894). In 1960 Telembí was a thriving Negro village of several hundred people, and the greater part

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CHAPTER II

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Kinship. The eliciting of kinship terminology among the Cayapa proved to be extremely difficult and time consuming. Many informants professed to be ignorant of many of the terms and clearly preferred to use Spanish nomenclature; however, sufficient data were collected to illustrate a major structural shift from Barrett's 1909 recording to the writer's 1960 notes. At present, the writer is unable to account for this shift in terms of Barrett's material and his own, as the residence and marriage patterns remain basically the same in the reports of the two investigators; however, there is some indication that new terminological forms were just beginning to come into the language in 1909. It is also known that the Cayapa tribe has undergone a process of fission, changing from one unit in 1809 to three in 1909 and four by 1960! We lack most of the vital details, but it is a reasonable assumption that changes in residence either went along with or followed the formation of the new groups.

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will be paid for by the nearest kin of the deceased.

Except for the recent (ca. 1940) colony at Sapallito, each of the three tribal groups has a church constructed in the western manner with plank siding and flooring. The planks for the siding are all placed vertically. The roofing is of thatch and is of split construction; a clerestory space of about two feet runs along the full length of the church on both sides between the upper and lower roofs. Within the church is an altar, and before it, in the Punta Venado Church, is a large crucifix with a carved, realistic Christ figure. Infants are buried inside the church behind the altar, because they are pure and undefiled by sin. Adults are buried in consecrated ground several minutes' walk from the ceremonial center proper. Chiefs are buried just outside of the Church door under the bell which hangs from the projecting lower roof. The ceremonial center is populated by the dead and their spirits. A Cayapa is always buried in the ceremonial center to which he belongs, and he inherits his membership from his father. He may attend fiestas at any of the other centers, but he must be buried where he belongs.

Adults and children are buried in a cemetary

area called the panteón, while infants are buried directly inside the church. When an /inʸi/ dies he is buried immediately outside the church entrance underneath the church bell that is suspended from the projecting roof. The Cayapa maintain that it is very important to be buried in the ceremonial center to which one belongs. Ceremonial allegiance is inherited in the patrilineal line and even though one has spent all or most of his life living in one of the other tribal groups, they believe that one should still be buried in the proper center. If a Cayapa should die far from home, he is interred at the site of death. Thereafter, attempts are made to bring the bones back for a proper funeral and burial. A casket is made, and the bones are laid out. The mourning and gaiety described above are carried out, but in a much more perfunctory fashion.

Medical Practices. Illness for the Cayapa is mainly a matter of soul loss or spirit possession. To a lesser extent, the cause of the illness may be the presence of small physical objects such as stones or thorns which have been placed within the body by means of witchcraft.

The /ũnʸi/ chief of each of the tribal sections is the acknowledged leader of the section; however the national government of Ecuador has inscribed the chief of the Punta Venado section as governor of all the Cayapa. The Indians of the other three groups say that while this governor is indeed superior to the others, he can in no way interfere in their internal affairs nor give orders to them. This is quite different from the situation reported by Barrett where in 1909 the chief of Punta Venado was in effective control of all of the other groups, allowing their chiefs to handle only minor matters (Barrett: personal communication). Office is inherited in the patrilineal line.

The /kãsa ũnʸi/ may become the chief upon the death of the /ũnʸi/ provided the eldest son of the /ũnʸi/ is not old enough, or perhaps does not want the job. In these instances the brothers of the late governor may be considered. All of the offices mentioned pass within the male line as a rule, but they may pass out of the line if no one wants the job or if no one within the line is capable of handling it. Regardless of title, the duties of the officials are the same: they are expected to maintain order at the various festive occasions, and they are expected to adjudicate disputes among the Cayapa.